

Karen Hollis | May 23, 2021

Acts 2:1-21 | Psalm 104 | John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Pentecost

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

I've been reading this book called "The Sparrow," along with the sequel, "Children of God." It's a story about a Jesuit mission to another planet and the effects of the encounter on individuals and communities. The characters spend hours in conversation, trying to bridge the canyon between their cultures; they piece together languages, grieve misunderstandings, and lean into friendships as they try to make sense of the past and figure out how to move forward. In one such conversation, one character acknowledges the struggle of her companion by quoting a mutual and beloved friend who once said, "wisdom lies between 'that doesn't make any sense' and 'I don't understand.'" I burst into tears when I read it. There's a subtle and vast difference between the two, isn't there. It's the difference between trying to make the world fit my own understanding and honouring my own perspective as one of many. The space between these two statements, this wisdom space is a powerful place for the Spirit . . .

As you listened a few minutes ago to the story of the Holy Spirit coming on Pentecost, what was your response? Is there a person or group of people with whom you resonate? Are you excited by the prospect of spontaneously speaking other languages? Do you wonder if they weren't all just under the influence? Do you sit back amazed? Do you wonder about what this means for the future or what it says about the past? I've never been a great Bible scholar, so for a long time I thought this story kind of came out of nowhere. I didn't know how many times Jesus told the disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to be with them. I didn't put together that Jesus, himself had received the Holy Spirit at his own baptism, and it was the Spirit who helped Jesus in his own ministry. But even before that, the Spirit of God was at work in the world and in relationship with our ancestors in faith. Moses used to go up and be with God on the mountaintop . . . once the Tabernacle was built, the Spirit of God came down off the mountain and dwelt within it. As God's story unfolded, the Spirit of God was with particular people, like King David and prophets like Elijah. So on

the day of Pentecost, the Spirit did something that the Spirit does, but also something completely new; the Spirit came to the whole gathering and rested on everyone and remained with them. This ritual of receiving the Spirit was quickly included with baptism in rituals to welcome new members to those following the way of Jesus.

Today in the church, Bishops and Ministers confirm the faith of the baptized by laying on hands and praying that they receive and be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Journeying with the Holy Spirit isn't just for prophets and saviours anymore . . . we don't have to go to a particular place to find God, rather the Holy Spirit dwells with each of us . . . the Spirit goes where you go . . . each of us has access to the Spirit as we navigate the things that come with being human in the 21st Century, as we grow and deepen in our relationship with God, and as we serve in the way Jesus teaches.

The Spirit makes her power known on this Pentecost day. She shows us what is possible . . . that even in a place like the Middle East, people can speak the words of neighbours, they can listen and understand. Even in a place that has seen generations of unbelievable conflict, it is possible to break through what is rigid and separate into a place of pause, a place of listening and astonished attention. This is a powerful place for the Spirit, to disrupt our usual ways of being and suspend us in disbelief, unsure how to respond . . . this is also a powerful place for prayer.

As we begin to make preparations for living into our covenant it is an opportune time to be reminded of the role of the Holy Spirit as the one who does something unexpected that makes everyone pause and take notice; the Holy Spirit offers possibilities when we are stuck and at the end of our rope; the one who makes it possible for us to hear and understand, to be vulnerable enough to try to speak like another. The Spirit doesn't make people comfortable; she pushes people to the edge of vulnerability, to places where we have the courage to say, I don't understand.

May we all have courage today to receive the Holy Spirit anew, because we may indeed need her on the road ahead and we may indeed be glad she is with us. Thanks be to God.